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ABSTRACT

This study examines persistence narratives of female immigrants in three public library literacy programs. The narrative analysis method was used. Transcripts of student interviews and biographical portraits were read, and incidents, images, events, and statements concerning persistence supports and barriers, literacy, and language learning were highlighted. A timeline of persistence events was built, and a persistence narrative was created about each student. The storylines and narratives for three students are presented. Emerging themes are discussed, including the role of husbands, health problems, belief in education, transportation problems, workplace issues, childcare, and the role of the library. Theoretical and practical implications are summarized, including the need for more proactive advocacy on the part of librarians for immigrant communities, the women's need for more practice in assertiveness, and provision of support mechanisms. (Contains 94 references.) (MES)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

"And They Let You Know You're Not Alone and That's What They're Here For:" Persistence Narratives of Women Immigrants in Public Library Literacy Programs

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ED 468 913

> The past was only my cradle and now it cannot hold me, because I am grown too big; just as the little house in Polotzk, once my home, has now become a toy of memory, as I move about at will in the wide spaces of this splendid palace [the Boston Public Library] whose shadow covers acres. No! It is not I that belong to the past, but the past that belongs to me." (Antin, 1969 p.364)

The poetic, heroic ending of Mary Antin's story, *The Promised Land*, written in the early 1900s, reflects her enduring faith in the public library as entre into American public life. It echoes nearly a century later for immigrant women who come to the library for literacy and citizenship purposes, and to feel a sense of belonging and engagement with a "safe" American institution while they are in transition. Simone Smith (pseudonym), a student in the Centers for Reading and Writing, Fordham branch of the New York Public Library in the early part of the next century, explains her experience of writing in her tutoring group as it connects to why she persists, "but we're always into our group, and the main thing that I -- you know, I would say differently when I'm writing, that you come in, and if you feel depressed or you have a letter to write, you could speak to someone in the office, and they will help you. And they let you know you're not alone, and that's what they're here for. And believe you me, if you come here tired and didn't want to come to school, when you leave here you feel like a million dollars, because working with your tutor, and working – and other students, they're different and you feel like you learned something."

The library, referred nostalgically by Mary in the twentieth century as a "kingdom in the slum," (1969, p. 337) and in the twenty-first century by Simone as making her feel like "a million dollars," temporarily "holds" (Adult Development Research Group, 2001) both women users, physically and psychologically, as they shift from private to public lives, and rely on an enduring, secular, free place for adult community-based education. Libraries have the potential to act as safe "public homeplaces" and "free zones" (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997), building foundations for life-long literacy and learning exploration, through its equal access policies, large spaces for meeting, an emphasis on diverse print and electronic collections, its philosophy of developing in people a "love of reading," free instructional media, focus on personalized service, and flexible hours in an institution that has persevered for over a century.

Libraries hold stories and library literacy programs in them allow for the telling of stories by women students, who are the majority of its participants (see, Spangenberg, 1996). Since the stories of working-class, poor, and women of color are often absent from library shelves, a literacy program that promotes these women's stories can be viewed as counterhegemonic to these literary traditions. Therefore, the act of personal expressiveness in libraries by students who would be considered non-traditional users

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(Nauratil, 1985) is an expansion of the library role as a community-based "anchor" (Spangenberg, 1996), and as a sponsor of literacy (see, Brandt, 2001) for those who are disenfranchised, and not for just those who have more formal education, publish their stories, and use the library most. Libraries have always been sponsors of literacy to immigrants, by "stimulating" the culture of reading, and in return, have depended on this population to build the educational foundations of library adult services, including literacy programs (Monroe, 1986).

An important strategy for studying women's lives in relation to institutions is to "look for what's been left out" and to investigate "significant aspects of individual social positions and the implications of these positions" (Stewart, 1994). As the women in these programs struggle to persist, admist myriad obstacles, I must also be aware of my own persistence and worldview as a researcher. As a woman researcher, former librarian, and literacy instructor studying women students' lives in library literacy programs, I have to be aware of the biased story I bring to the table as I construct persistence narratives of women students with lenses from the technical literature I have consulted and a worldview from the academic places I inhabit.

Simone tells her own story as she writes a story with "a state of grace" (Mackeracher, 1989), rich with symbolism about her cultural life. It is about a girl she knew in her school's lunch line who was recently murdered. Simone sadly remembers her smile. Simone's story and her participation in this literacy program is part of a larger gendered story about women immigrants' relations with the library that surpass and expand models of ethnic institutional relations, and which are reflective of the women's narrative literacy needs. This gendered story, between women literacy participants and libraries, is subtle. While Simone's anecdote is less gushing and assimilative as Mary's words (who was not a library literacy participant), they share the importance of the stability of the library for them, and for their perseverance in American public life. As they transition from home to public, they use the library as a safe reference point in their reflexive shifts. Persistence can be viewed as part of women's movement and journey into the worlds of formal and non-formal education.

Simone, a former domestic, and presently, a school cafeteria employee, works with children who remind her of her own educational experiences, "Because when I was a young girl growing up, my dream was to be a nurse and I did not succeed. Now I'm working in the school, and I think, drifting back, if I have the education, I would love to work with children and then move on with adults in the future." Through the library literacy program, Simone believes that by going, she can "do things, for myself" and "be better in my life." Her identity is forming as she moves into this new world and experiences "tensions and turning points" (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Cross, 1981) as she persists in her literacy education. Women's pasts, presents, and dreams for their futures are constructed as they use and participate actively in the library while they are in life transitions.

Libraries, Literacy, and Immigrants

From Eastern European Jewish communities to Jamaican communities, the public library has served continuously in neighborhoods, and symbolized democracy, a public identity, and citizenship for its communities through lending books, providing diverse media, in different languages, instructional resources and assistance, and personalized reference, reading advisory, and information services. Yet, as supplements to schools, libraries have also been invested in being a neutral social follower of change, not a "change agent," and for "quiet assimilation" and "social improvement" of its users mainly through self-education, and to maintain the social order (Dumont, 1977; Harris, 1986). Carnegie said, "the result of knowledge [gleaned from libraries] is to make men not violent revolutionaries, but cautious evolutionists; not destroyers but careful improvers." (Carnegie in Harris, 1973, p. 2513). Beginning, like schools, as part of social reforms for society, and as part of the progressive ideologies of its time (Buschman & Carbone, 1991; Harris, 1986), library literacy programs reflect the development of library services. Like libraries, the focus has traditionally been on the individual and library literacy programs have offered a combination of a humanistic, liberal, literacy services, reflective, in part of traditional library services to offer the "best books on the best subjects" (Melvil Dewey in Vann, 1978, p. 70) to patrons but also to encourage their personal goals. The personal expressiveness orientation (Wrigley, 1993) forms the core philosophy and practices of many library literacy programs. This individualistic approach often (although not always) overshadows the need for support mechanisms that could allow for comprehensive access to the programs, for example, childcare and transportation. Instructionally, literacy for social change, and social advocacy, like project-based learning activities, are not emphasized as much as language experience and phonics methods. The personalized focus of libraries and library literacy programs can be problematic for overlooking particular group's support and instructional needs.

Most of these programs would consider themselves "client-centered," and integrate both skills-based and whole language approaches (Estabrook & Lakner, 2000; Spangenberg, 1996). They celebrate and recognize cultural diversity, with the individual learner as central. This aspect makes them qualitatively different from other conventional programs that emphasize more of a group emphasis with a technological management orientation (see, Wrigley, 1993), a growing trend in adult education programs with increasing national accountability demands. As these library literacy programs become more integrated within the adult education network, it is questionable whether or not they too will follow along within this particular orientation.

Traditionally, libraries were to be, "the crowning glory of the public schools" (Ticknor in Harris, 1973) for working-class and immigrant adults, who would give the library a legitimate purpose and a new market on par with public schools. But as Harris (1973) found, services to immigrants were due largely to their own "persistence and sheer numbers" than to a willingness to serve them. This paradox marks its historical relationship with this population, and extends into the 21st century with literacy programs having a marginal existence in public libraries, usually in the back of the library-- if programs exist at all, and without a full-fledged political stronghold in the American Library Association—seen as important in principle, but less so in practice.

Library service to immigrants, from its beginnings in the late 1800s has been characterized historically on a continuum from anglo-conformity to pragmatic and sympathetic cultural pluralism. On the one end, social reformers, such as John Foster Carr emphasized melting-pot assimilation, and librarians followed along with their Americanization efforts. Librarians were viewed as "apostles of culture" (Garrison, 1979) and the library was a type of canonical "grand hotel" (Harris, 1995) providing materials that would uplift and restrain social ills if and when people came to its doors. It was also important that librarians develop the moral character of patrons and instill in them a "library faith" (Wiegand, 1998). One business leader (John J. Arnold, Vice President of the National Bank of Chicago) capitalized on the business community to support this effort, and believed collaborations could market the library better since it carried a moral force for immigrants with 'high culture' collections, "Any movement for the use of the library in Americanization of the foreigner, is properly presented to the business interests of our communities is sure to result in the development of more generous financial support....we can make no investment of money that will bring larger returns than to furnish our new brothers with the best books, the best music and the best environment. To spend an evening with a group of our foreign born in the study of literature or music without a doubt bring the conviction that here is the most fertile ground for the sowing of the seed of Americanization. We must aim to develop the normal man, which includes his physical, mental and spiritual nature." (1919, p. 18-19). The library could expand its base to other adult education agencies, especially the evening schools, with the hope that "the teacher of evening school classes will often be a useful missioner...it gives an opportunity for an explanation of the library's place in our municipal system and of its importance and purpose" (Carr, 1919, p. 60). This reciprocal relationship between immigrants and libraries was viewed as benefiting both immigrant communities and the future of the library.

On the other end of the spectrum, library leaders like, Ernestine Rose, emphasized the roles of librarians in actively engaging with this population in a substantive manner that would help immigrants with their acculturation into American public life. Librarians assisted immigrants through foreign collections, comfortable environments which allowed for their own dress codes and manners, some community needs assessments, librarian assistants that speak different languages, personalized service, and stimulation to read, and acclimate to American public life. They actively marketed the library to this population with leaflets, flyers, and promoted their foreign collections. Their enthusiasm and advocacy allowed them to be labeled as "sovereign alchemists" (Jones, 1999). The idea was to assist them to become citizens while also endorsing their languages and cultures (see, Beck, 1992; Dain, 1975; Fain, 1992; Jones, 1991, 1999). In addition, newer immigrants could induct one another into the library. These perspectives, on either end of the spectrum, captures the diversity of services that were offered throughout the country, of which literacy services were a part, but not central to the library mission with this population. But it does not capture the contradictory, varied nature of the service. It doesn't highlight the limited nature of service to this population, and how it was paradoxical.

Although librarians were invested in efforts to make immigrants feel more welcome to the library, even Rose exclaimed as early as 1917, that the purpose of the library and the collections and services targeted to immigrants were primarily to hook these communities into using the library (even through foreign language materials) and to eventually develop Americanized habits and character. She said, "All of the work of the library must be foreign, if it is to be effective. Yet the library is and must remain an aggressively American institution, or fail in its patriotic and educational function. Its books in large part must be in English. It is the clear teaching of my experience that the majority of its assistants should be American." (Rose, 1917, p. 19). During this period, from 1890-1920, library literacy services to immigrants were largely through mother's clubs, civics classes, collaboration with evenings schools, providing English and foreign language collections and citizenship materials, flyering the community, some English classes, community needs assessments and home visits by librarians. The limitations and passive approaches of these early literacy services to this population (not direct, extensive instruction in either native language literacy or English literacy, social activism, and comprehensive community needs assessments) have been considered evidence that it was more idiosyncratic, subject to similar problematic relations libraries have historically with immigrant communities.

The gap between rhetoric and practice was expressed in the 1970s, when revisionist historians started to counter celebratory library histories (see, Birge, 1981; DuMont, 1977; Harris, 1973, 1986; Nauratil, 1985; Wiegand, 1989). The library was described (Haro in Constantino, 1998) as a, "a gringo middle-class institution. " Services were viewed more as ambivalent, Americanized, and passive, than totally pluralistic and proactive. This trend continued, with libraries, in the 1980s, regarded as "adrift in a sea of change" (Carlson, et al. 1990) admist the changing populations surrounding them, and not utilizing in full their community's multilingual "gatekeepers" who could foster greater library use and informational assistance to immigrant communities (Metoyer-Duran, 1993). For this reason, librarians were called, "ambivalent missionaries" (Nauratil, 1985) rather than activist, cultural pluralists. Librarian relations with immigrants was viewed as a paradox because of the presence of both ambivalence and excitement in their provision of services (Wiegand, 1989). This tension is evident in the struggle to centralize literacy and diversity issues in ALA today.

Libraries, like library literacy programs, may not directly address social problems of its participants although they may promote the "culture of multiculturalism" and "recognition." (Martin, 2001; Quezada, 1992; Suarez-Orazco, 2001a) especially with the focus on the individual. In this way, libraries offer what Stromquist (2001a) refers to as a limited type of access to literacy education, especially with regard to people's social citizenship (meaning, freedom from social problems like hunger and poverty). Libraries, in celebrating their neutrality and equal treatment rather than special services for targeted populations, have not offered a political basis to provide full access to people who may not be able to walk through the doors, or, see its resources. Neglecting this problem would be akin to ignoring the library's social responsibility to offer equal access of services to all community members and compensate those who need skills to enter its doors (Coleman, 1989; Nauratil, 1985). Librarians, in not wanting to be teachers or social

workers, have played an ambivalent, resistant role in literacy and adult education services historically, even with native born populations and for those deemed as "disadvantaged" (see, Birge, 1981; Brown, 1975; DuMont, 1977; Lipsman, 1972; Lyman, 1977ab; MacCann, 1989; McDonald, 1966; Monroe, 1986; Nauratil, 1991). Partially, the confusion lies with the roles and training of librarians; they were educated to "stimulate" reading not to instruct in literacy, and with the library functioning as a space for "mature" and analytical reading (Monroe, 1986). Helen Lyman, a library literacy researcher in the 1970s, drew on McClusky's margin of power framework and advocated the library as helping people with "daily tasks of living, the expansion of horizon's of life and self-realization" (in Monroe, 1986, p. 201). She also advocated for literacy programs because they addressed reading as a maturation process. She encouraged librarians through training, assessments, and materials, to take a more proactive than a passive approach to building reading skills.

Currently, most public libraries offer literacy services of some type (information and referrals, collections, technology, space to meet, collaboration with adult schools and literacy agencies) while a third offer direct literacy instruction through tutors trained in the library (Estabrook & Lakner, 2000). The trend of direct instruction as one of the least offered literacy services in libraries has been consistent from the 1960s through the 1990s (see, Lyman, 1973; Zweizig, Wilcox-Johnson, Robbins, 1989; Spangenberg, 1996) Library literacy programs were formalized during the 1960s and were targeted to native born populations under federal initiatives and funding with the War on Poverty to offer intensive literacy services to underserved populations. While Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs predominate in library literacy programs, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs have grown in them too (see, Estabrook & Lakner, 2000). In addition, immigrants, particularly English-speaking populations, have long used the ABE services and have participated in important federal studies and research on library literacy programs (see, Lyman, 1973).

These programs are smaller than most state-run adult education programs, rely on a volunteer tutor base but also contain professional staff who are adult educators, offer privacy and do not ask for documentation like social security numbers, are open on Saturdays and at many other hours, and have flexible, specialty types of programming that leans towards non-formal education. The diverse curricula is accessible, ranging from student writings to community life issues books to genre, commercial grammar workbooks and non-fiction, especially history books. Collections are also in the form of tapes, software, pocket books, text books, and video that can be checked out. Students can grab books and tapes off of the shelves, read them in-house, and borrow them at any time. Free Voluntary Reading and self-study is encouraged through a philosophy of a "love of reading," via romance to GED workbooks (see, Constantino, 1998). Diverse instructional modes include one-on-one tutoring, and small group tutoring (most are open entry). ESOL and ABE "classes" are taught by part-time teachers. Computer-assisted learning is also offered in most programs. Sometimes, students form groups with one another. Students often feel a sense of belonging, as if the library were a secular church, or a club; they use their library cards as an initial step in claiming a public, validated identity in the community. In this sense, public libraries are a type of safe port for those

who are newly arrived, in life transitions, and in need of some community services. Family and friends often tell them about the library, and the literacy programs in them.

The literacy programs target the hardest to reach, with the lowest levels of literacy as well as those with learning disabilities (usually 5th grade and under). They also outreach to a range of ESOL students (in terms of education and English literacy skills), vis-a-vis the library policies of "equal access" and a commitment on the part of literacy directors to reach those who have been neglected by other educational agencies. The absence of strict accountability requirements and quantitative assessments, the long, staggered hours, multiple technological learning resources, layered staffing with volunteers, and curriculum make library literacy programs more flexible, open institutions, with personal, non-formal types of services that may attract more immigrants with attention to their multiple needs.

Library literacy programs are quantitatively and qualitatively different from other types of programs because of their deep ties to the library, in terms of physical space, principles, and organizational features. Library literacy programs also view themselves as part of community-building efforts and their roles to fill in gaps left by other neighborhood education providers has been recognized as an issue (see, Smith, 1984). They may offer programming that offsets and supplements conventional classes in the community. Paying attention to how these types of programs can provide better access and services are important for improving immigrant community relations with the library and for advocating for these populations.

Library literacy programs, since the 1960s, have attempted to bridge the fields of adult education and librarianship with community-based initiatives and ALA has supported this cause. Often, however, the form of support has been in an abstract way, compared to other adult services in libraries which are better supported. Since the 1990s, ALA has more explicitly endorsed literacy as one of its main missions ("21st century literacy"), and even joined forces with Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund to push and enlarge the adult literacy role. Through its new, special office of literacy outreach (OLOS), libraries are coached as to how to become more "literacy ready." (see, for example, http://www.buildliteracy.org/index.htm). ALA has endorsed 'mainstream' types of literacy provision and as it connects to information services and library agendas (see, ALA, 1998 December issue). From 1998, this meant:

> 21st Century Literacy is one of five key action areas adopted by the American Library Association to fulfill its mission of providing the highest quality library and information services for all people. Helping children and adults develop skills they need to fully participate in an information society -- whether it's learning to read or explore the Internet--is central to that mission. (ALA, American Libraries, December, 1998, inset cover)

The programs for this study (three selected programs—in Greensboro, North Carolina—the Glenwood branch library; in Redwood City, CA—Project READ, and in

New York City--The New York Public Library's, Centers for Reading and Writing) have diverse programming and include, conversation clubs with native-born community members, Basic ESOL tutoring groups, citizenship classes, women's literacy classes, TOEFL classes, computer assisted software and assistance in labs, book discussion groups, poetry classes, basic reading and writing classes, student advisory groups, field trips to local agencies, community celebrations and student authorship performances. The programs have one-to-one tutoring and small group tutoring in off-site and on-site locations in the library. Many of these programs aim to develop a community of tutors, students, and staff, along with ABE students as well, so there are fewer strict boundaries among these populations.

Libraries, and the literacy programs in them, have the potential to become a true "people's university," as Melvil Dewey first articulated in the 1800s (in Vann, 1978), and as many library advocates have asserted (Johnson, 1938; Gary Strong in DeCandido, 2001) for lifelong learning and literacy. Its counterhegemonic purposes have been advocated, for example, as a popular education center (Freire, 1987) and as " ripe for decentering" practices (Foucault in Radford, 1998). It is filled with symbolic contradictions which emerge in narratives of its users (Graff, 1991). It may also be a safe haven of public and community social services in the early part of the 21st century (i.e., proposition 187, proposition 227), and for information on housing, employment and training, instructional class, INS and legal rights, welfare benefits, instruction, services for children and as an intellectual space for immigrant students and in the development of cultural citizenship; offering services that schools cannot (see, Aguirre, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2001b). Although the literacy programs do not challenge structural inequalities, or take strong ideological positions, thereby offering limited access, they build on a more personal human relations approach (Sleeter and Grant, 1987) which has an important value. During an era of work-force accountability and globalized capitalism which tends to objectify students for the sake of funding stakeholders, library literacy programs can provide a significant personalized niche (Pena-McCook & Barber, 2001) for immigrants that other adult education agencies cannot accommodate.

Persistence, Literacy, and Women Immigrants

A sharper lens for viewing access, barriers, and persistence in a broader, contextualized way than retention counts and discrete goals is needed in the field of adult literacy. Using multiple theoretical frameworks for addressing women's persistence patterns in these library literacy programs illuminates the library in a broader social context and the many social forces that impinge on it historically, through the standpoints (see, Harding, 1991) of women immigrants who use it. An institutional perspective is needed as well as feminist perspectives to lend a broader lens to the problem of persistence among women immigrants.

Persistence in this study, is defined, in more inclusive terms as a sense of movement and as an educational journey with attention to people's feelings; as a state of belonging and engagement with a literacy institution in meaningful ways to people (on both intellectual and emotional levels); as a set of literacy and language acquisition practices outside of the program that includes self-study and involvement in other

educational community agencies: states of retention in a program, as it is connected with social forces in women's lives that impact access; and finally, as part of contexts, preconditions, and histories of women's educational involvement. Persistence, redefined from its more traditional fixed retention figure, becomes a journey in process rather than a stipulated point of participation. Studies that have focused on barriers to persistence have relied on three basic categories to examine persistence problems among students (institutional, situational, and psycho-social or attitudinal barriers) with the focus on dropout and length of time in a program, as well as individual motivation. Most studies have shown that adult education students drop out soon after they arrive and there is a need to focus on front-end types of services, especially the first three weeks (see, Quigley, 1998) with the need to try and help the students adopt different attitudes towards schooling. Yet, this perspective is usually from top-down institutional perspectives. A more bottom-up perspective, that relies on ethnographic techniques, would reveal that these categories are interrelated and more complex. In addition, students may leave and return or study alone, or go to other community programs, and therefore see themselves as persisting, even while a particular program views them as dropouts (See, Belzer, 1998). An exception to the traditional framework on barriers and one-time retention rates in a program is a focus on persistence as non-context bound, and mediated through forces in students' lives, including the supports programs offer to help them (see, Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999). The fact that many students leave programs and return to the same one or to another nearby program is another way of looking at persistence not as a fixed state, but as a phenomenon over time and space and which is integrated into someone's life span.

Except for a few studies (See, Cumming, 1992; Rockhill, 1990, 1993; Isserlis, 2000; Norton, 2000), there has been little attention to the specific problems of immigrant women. These studies have pointed out a range of barriers women experience, from domestic obligations, trauma, work exploitation, discrimination, abuse issues, lack of on-site childcare, location of classes, course schedules that conflict with family demands, part-time work, transportation, and attitudes of social network members, often husbands and children (Cumming, 1992; Rockhill, 1990, 1993; Stromquist, 1990, 2001ab). Immigrant women also have to contend with multiple language barriers which can exacerbate these other problems. Women often don't feel they have safe places to authentically communicate and need more opportunities for practice in speaking and gaining public identities and voices (Rockhill, 1990, 1993; Norton, 2000; Horsman, 2000). These studies point to power issues which are pervasive in women's lives but often neglected in programming. Nelly Stromquist's research extends this contextualized perspective through a macro-level analysis of women's literacy education by arguing that without basic support inputs, programs are shutting the door to women's basic access to literacy education. Without dealing with structural inequalities, programs are complying and reproducing them; family responsibilities should not be examined merely as a programmatic problem with the need to make schedule changes to accommodate for women's domestic obligations. Instead, the programs need to offer support mechanisms and reflective critical literacy practices that offer women opportunities to expand their social citizenship and advocacy roles that counter their narrow reproductive ones, "because the problem exceeds technical parameters" (1990, p. 5-6)

Theoretical Lenses for Studying Women Immigrants' Experiences and Identities

Gathering women's stories can reveal the interplay of women's institutional and personal network relations, including but not exclusively, with a focus on the library. Women's personal networks, their engagement with other educational associations and activities, and their everyday home lives are important to gauge for a full picture of what it means for women to persist. As the women cross various institutional borders, they are contending with different authorities, using different literacies and assistance. Paying attention to the discourses which frame literacy provision in society (Campbell, 1992; Horsman, 1990) are important for understanding how women construct their identities and the ways they value their experiences of literacy and language acquisition. Narratives and qualitative research which highlight women's roles, relations, and their subjective accounts are important for examining how they read and exert control over their worlds (see, Campbell, 1992). It is important to consider frameworks that take into account not only women's subjectivities but how women's perspectives are shaped both by men's experiences and the dominant push-pull forces surrounding them and felt by them (Luttrell, 1997).

Kathleen Rockhill's (1990) research on Mexican American women's private literacies and public speaking needs allowed me to see the importance of language communication in a public space and how it is different than home life, as well as how women immigrants struggle to carve out identity niches within their hostile surroundings. Nelly Stromquist's structural work (1990, 2001ab) on barriers and access to non-formal education and the sexual division of labor that encompasses women's citizenship is relevant for an institutional perspective. Bonny Norton's (2000) research on women immigrants also captures the importance of a situated learning, power, and practice framework with attention to women immigrants' affective filters and the communities they inhabit that reinforce and inhibit their language uses and acquisition. These theories are important for illuminating holistic issues that encompass women's experiences of literacy education and step beyond conventional persistence studies by emphasizing gender and socio-historical contexts. This montage of theories and studies are important for capturing persistence issues in another light, with overlapping, economic, social, cultural, and psychological domains that deeply affect women's lives. These theories pay special attention to women's needs for community, identity transformations, and their invisibility as women immigrants in dominant society--persistence emerges as a practice that is constructed through women's multiple roles, power relations, and local conditions (see Safman, 1986) outside and inside institutions.

Data collecting and Data Analysis

Data collecting

This sub-study stems from a larger study on persistence of students in library literacy programs (see, Comings, Cuban, Bos, & Taylor, 2001). Multi-site ethnographic methods were used to create case studies of three programs that serve ESOL and ABE immigrant students in three reputable library literacy programs. They have been studied over a two year period and the author has visited these three programs a total of fifteen

times, each visit lasting between three to five days, plus five orientation one day visits. Observations and interviews with program participants were conducted, while cross-comparing the data across the programs. The library literacy programs were selected because they are in different geographical locations and exhibit different models of service, offering a range of perspectives, although they reveal common themes too as library literacy programs.

The program in Redwood City, CA offers an intergenerational approach to literacy. They serve mainly Latino populations who reside in this Bay Area location. They offer both adult literacy and LEP (or ESOL) programs for student's families, like storytelling hours, homework help, and literacy in Spanish for children. They are housed in the library but are spread throughout local public schools, a jail, and sponsor community events, services, and projects with other nearby agencies. They offer small group tutoring, one-to-one tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, peer tutoring for inmates, Learning Disability programming, and family literacy. They also have some childcare services as well. The Greensboro Public Library's Glenwood branch serves many refugees and immigrants surrounding this small library in a mixed neighborhood. The library has an extensive multicultural and non-profit collection and works intensively with other community agencies on literacy campaigns and advisory committees, especially for its growing Latino populations. The adult program operates conversation clubs, has a computer lab, and many specialty types of classes, family literacy, plus one-to-one tutoring. It has recently begun limited transportation and childcare services. It could be considered a neighborhood, multicultural model of service. The New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing programs, funded under the Mayor's office is officially considered an Adult Basic Education program, but many immigrant students attend these programs. They are spread throughout several boroughs and have computer-assisted instruction, small group tutoring, internet classes, book discussion groups, and promote student writings and publications. They model a literary approach to adult literacy programming with an emphasis on student authorship, especially writing. A holistic picture of each program was needed to learn the contexts and conditions of persistence among women immigrants from an institutional perspective.

The student's perspective was considered paramount. Open-ended interviews were given to the students during the first year of data collecting and which encompassed biographical information, the supports and barriers in their lives that helped and hindered their abilities to attend programs, their education histories, their literacy activities outside the program, their subjective assessments of their activities and progress in the program, and their overall experiences in the programs were explored. Each interview involved a mapping of supports based on social network mapping techniques (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990; Antonucci, 1986). During the second year of data collecting, these three women will be re-interviewed (Simone already has been re-interviewed) to expand on themes from the first interviews, explore in-depth their education, literacy, and language experiences, and for member-checking. Two interviews each will be given during the second year so that an individual woman is interviewed a total of three different times about her persistence. In addition to interviews, observations of the students in classes or with their tutors, were also conducted. Documentation from their work folders and

records (database and print) were collected and analyzed. Visits to the students' homes were sometimes made, as with Malis and Elena—two of the women case studies. Photography was used in many of the site visits to document changes over time. But the students were not photographed for the sake of their privacy. Other adult education and literacy agencies in each of the three communities were contacted and interviewed about their roles, the role of the library literacy programs, and literacy issues in their communities.

Data Analysis

To highlight the women's subjectivities as well as conditions and contexts of their persistence, the narrative analysis method was used. Themes that affected the women as a group were also created, and which were based on a full reading of each women's narratives and which extended research findings from the literature review.

First, a rough transcript was made of each student's interview (most of the interview was recorded and formatted in paragraph form, with cues from the interviewer, to fit with a narrative model). Additionally, full transcriptions were made by an outside transcript company to accompany these rough transcripts, and to verify quotes. Secondly, a biographical portrait of each student based on demographic information they gave was created to obtain a chronological perspective of each of the woman's life experiences.

Then, each transcript and each biographical portrait was read and important critical and recurring incidents, images, events, and statements concerning persistence, supports and barriers, literacy, and language learning were highlighted. The third step was to build a persistence grid of numbered incidents (based on the student's biographical portrait and the rough transcript's highlights), which was a timeline of persistence events.

Finally, a persistence narrative was created about each student. The narrative would pinpoint a central dilemma around the student's persistence over a long period of time with redundant images, metaphors, and any statements they made about their education histories and their learning experiences, as well as their feelings about them. Chunks of data were often used for this purpose. So, for Simone, her persistence was recovering her childhood education and acquiring cultural capital through her program. For Malis, it was moving out of a state of paralysis. For Elena, it was about a return to professionalism. Their central dilemma created the storyline for each woman's narrative and which would form the central theme around her persistence. The storyline also produced the title for each woman's narrative. Elena, for example, had health problems resulting from cleaning houses. Her dream to become a nurse and a health professional in the U.S. in order to move out of a low-income domestic sphere was being filtered by many forces in her life, including her own health problems. "This is my big, big, big dream," Elena articulated in a clear way. These were checked and discussed with a team member from the larger study, and memo'd discussions were then used to develop themes across students, using a Grounded Theory cross-comparison method of analysis (for the larger persistence study rather than this study).

Narratives extends the feminist conceptualization of persistence as a compelling vehicle for exposing complex relationships and problems (see, Clark & Brooks, 2001). Using narratives as a means for understanding persistence of the women factors multidimensional contexts, including historical conditions, gender, and culture, thereby contributing to increased validity. Women's narratives according to Brooks and Clark (2001), allow for three dimensions to be explored. This approach broadens and deepens the qualities of persistence in women's lives. These include three characteristics: 1) Narratives move from past to future, 2) Narratives span the psychological, social, cultural, and historical dimensions in content and form, and (3) Narratives include cognitive, affective, spiritual, and somatic dimensions. Narrative analysis, according to these researchers, have the benefit of understanding women's identity changes, and lends insights unavailable with other analytic approaches. Stories can illuminate rich contexts of women's lives (Whitherell & Noddings, 1991).

The many open-ended questions that were asked were more like question guideposts and offered the women opportunities to reconstruct past and current events and their experiences of these events (see, Cuban, 1999; Seidman, 1991); questions like, "How was that?" and "Can you tell me about that experience," yielded story analysis for various stages of their lives. Developing narratives allows for a clearer picture to emerge about the experience and process of persistence as it connects to relationships. It has the advantage of focusing specifically on each woman's unique discoveries and points of tension within their experiences. It also unearths some of the more veiled meanings and socially inappropriate issues that were hidden beneath the surface of the interviews (Giroux et al., 1996). While this approach does not escape researcher selection and subjectivity or capture the full context of the women's' situations, the narratives were about the women's powerful feelings and thoughts concerning their persistence experiences, not often known. Narratives, according to Riessman (1993) have sequences which could be: an introduction and orientation, actions, their evaluations, and a "resolution" to their struggles (Labov in Riessman, 1993). When the narratives were looked at in this way, most of the stories told something insightful about the women's persistence in education over a lifetime.

Sample

The three women were selected because they were all married, in mid-life, had worked or were working, and had similar persistence rates according to retention. These traits could be used as a basis of comparison. The women could also serve as representatives of their programs, showing how community demographics influence persistence. The women were of different nationalities too which would offer cultural variation. In addition, a case from an ABE program (NYPL) could be compared to two women in ESOL programs (Greensboro and Redwood City). The case studies revealed the impact of the communities and their programs on them, as well as how gender, race, and class combined in their experiences and identities around persisting. All of the women's names, and the names they mentioned in their narratives, were changed.

Focusing on "women immigrants" also allowed for the women to be viewed as a group with multiple needs and issues different from other groups (see, Stromquist, 2001ab). The immigrant women's lives were compared to the Adult Basic Education women students in the study as well as to immigrant men for any cultural and gendered patterns of participation and persistence. For many of the immigrant women, the library was one of their first reference points in their move from a more private to public worlds, (often although not always) as housewives, home health care workers, nannies, and housecleaners.

Women's Persistence Narrative Storylines

Storyline of Elena: "This is My Big, Big, Big Dream: Return to Professionalism"

Elena's story is of a forty-one year old Mexican-American woman's Dream in transition, and on the verge of turning sour. Her life is not like the Mickey Mouse handpainted character which outlines the white fence on her trailer, welcoming people in. Yet, she wishes her life could be as magical of an adventure. Her trailer, hidden behind the monied Silicon Valley lifestyle makes a dramatic contrast in wealth and poverty as configured in the Bay Area, especially the housing crisis. That she is a nurse trained in Mexico, and her competencies are not used during a national nursing shortage is a travesty, even as she works through nursing texts with her tutor, and as he has tried unsuccessfully to connect her with nursing contacts. Her tutor reminds her of her brother in Mexico and his ability to cross borders between Spanish and English allows her to cross over in many respects, although in more limited ways. She can explain her ideas better but she wonders if it can be translated into a future professional credits. The program allows her the flexibility to study topics she wants and needs, and the staff care about her as a student. They treat her as a whole person and attend to her family this way. But Elizabeth's problems exceed their ability to fully help her and they cannot fully compensate her for the transportation expenses, the cost of taking her young children on buses to schools and programs, and the fact that the bus rolls by her trailer park once an hour. She remembers the shelter she lived in with her husband and children fondly because it was more central and bigger than the small trailer, symbolic of her surreal, "big, big, big dream" with the reality of her deprivation. The health problems, specifically the rashes, resulting from her housekeeping work (in large wealthy homes) become constant reminders of her need to move out of this position but also filter her health professional dreams; and she wonders about the fastest way out of poverty and whose health matters most-- of putting herself, her husband, or her sons first. She wonders how she can learn to speak, read, and write English with all of these survival demands while also feeling invisible. The closest her family may get to a Disney experience are the movies she rents from her Public Library.

Storyline of Simone: "Drifting Back, If I have the Education: Recovering Education

This is a story of a woman who struggles to care for her children and family, while trying to receive an education, and to move from the home as a former nanny and housewife and into the public sphere as a school worker with benefits. She writes about a girl who was brutally murdered and raped in one of her school lunch lines in the Bronx. She remembers her smile and the effect of seeing the news on television and the impact it

has on her own life. She remembers her own experience in Jamaica and the loss of her education. She wants to care for her son's education too, but she has problems transporting him around especially in the rain, and has difficulties with reading and understanding his report cards, as well as his homework. She depends on the literacy staff to assist her with this responsibility, which they have done for a number of years. They provide a safe, caretaking role with her. But they also have connected her directly with work opportunities—her former tutor took Simone and others down to the school to apply for jobs and this was how she became a part-time cafeteria worker. While her husband does watch the children, while she is in the program, she worries about how long he will do this for and his willingness to endure. She feels he has an "attitude" and she tries to smooth over the problem by making sure the house is clean and dinner is ready before she leaves. This causes her extra strain. On evenings he can't watch the six year old, or in the afternoons when she wants to study on the computer, she brings him to the library but knows he feels cranky from not eating and after being in school. She knows that there are other students like her who drop out or don't persist because of similar problems. The staff have remained consistently available to her, even helping her at their homes, and she feels a sense of belonging and uplift after seeing them. She is also devoted to her tutor Mark who has been there many years. Yet she has hung on for a number of years to the program by a tenuous thread, in hopes she can recover the years she lost in education as a child and young adult.

Storyline of Malis: : "To Pass the Yellow Light:" A Story of Displacement and Paralysis

The library fills an empty space in the life of Malis, a 52 year old Cambodian woman who lives in Greensboro North Carolina with her son and husband, and was sponsored through a Vietnam Veteran. She waited to come to the US for two years where she lived with her children in a refugee camp in Thailand and suffered through many traumatic incidents, including death, loss, hunger, and depression. Since she recently quit her church, the library has been given a new focus to her. The library becomes an informal sponsor in her life, helping her where no one else would, and providing her with emotional support, informal advocacy services, social functions, and functional English. Yet she is lost, since she recently completed her citizenship goals and has larger ones in front of her with little instructional support. She has been home for two months due to a major car accident, which she got into on the way home from her class at the Glenwood library. Now, she does little else but watch television and misses the social aspects of her class. Her blocked access to the medical system, because of no insurance, her change in doctors, and her inability to navigate the managed care provider system, even with her son's help, lowers her sense of efficacy in dealing with English and American public life. Furthermore, her immobility increases her feelings of losing her memory, especially with reading due to low contact with others in her environment, and the medications she is on. She often ruminates about her older son who was killed in a car accident in Italy. She often question her abilities in this state of isolation, and feels paralyzed as to how to cope with daily demands and her dreams for the future. She feels trapped by the "yellow light" that symbolizes her distrust and displacement of being a citizen with few real benefits.

Persistence Narrative of Simone: "Drifting back, if I have the education": Recovering an Education

Simone, a forty-five year old Jamaican woman with short straight hair is preparing to write a story at her center's Bronx branch library literacy program, the Fordham Centers for Reading and Writing (CRW) at the New York Public Library (NYPL). The central character in Simone's story is not her, but a young girl who was recently murdered. The memory of this girl, and Simone's current experience as a lunch aide in the Catholic school where the girl attended and smiled at her, constantly makes Simone "drift back" to her early days; coming to the CRW and writing her story allows her to recover her early childhood experiences in school and dream about her educational future in a literary form that is reinforced in her center's program. She learns not just about writing her story, but also about the process of authorship and editing, as she explained, "we usually write it and they [the staff] help, they work on it, correct. And then we rewrite it over to make sure this is what you wanted. And after we write it over...you choose which piece you would like to go into the journal [a publication of student writings] then they would put it. But you have to bring it in time so it can be get together because it take a lot of work to get together." While she initially sought the program initially for basic skills, she is learning much more, "So I said, I would like something more where you almost start from the same basic things."

Time is important to Simone, who felt ashamed when she first came to the CRW "because I was so old. " She came to the CRW through a contact in her church and after a year long stint in a GED type program in which she felt behind other students. She felt like she was a girl again, "I find myself falling back in the same trap like when I was a little girl going to school—there was a group there who was way out. I started from scratch....I realized you know, it was hard there for me." She left due to her job, a difficult pregnancy, and an agreement she made with her husband to stay home for the infant. The responsibilities and demands of her two children and husband create pressures for her, "I just have to make time" she said. While she doesn't like to miss her Saturday tutoring group or her evening math class, it is difficult for her to juggle the needs of her sons with her desire to attend at these times. The six year old who attends karate class and other programs on the weekends necessitates transporting him around and caring for him, making it difficult for her to take care of her own needs for learning. In addition, coming in the afternoons is difficult too, since after she picks him up, he is "tired and hungry and cranky" because he doesn't eat his school lunch. Simone was proud to take him to nursery school, but finds the travel back and forth difficult.

She is sometimes late for her tutor, David's group. When she brings him, like some of the other mothers do, he moves back and forth and runs around. The Fordham CRW doesn't have childcare, and Simone recognizes from the other adults that this "is an adult program" and many other adults do not like the noise and disturbances. She understands how the other adults feel because like her, they also are getting an education for the first time but struggle with multiple family demands which pull on their time

away from the program. This makes her desire to be "better in my life" more difficult for her to achieve." Although Simone feels like she belongs to the program and relates to the staff like extended family, she also feels pulled in many different directions. Still, she feels it is better than staying home where she does not get a chance to learn, "but if I'm at home, I don't really get the time to sit down and take up the book, because I be like the dinner is to make, the kitchen to clean and [her son] will be calling, "mummy I'm hungry."

She knows she is not alone and notices the other students' inconsistent attendance, "because of the job schedule. People have to leave....and they have to switch around." She also notices that like her, childcare is a problem for them, "sometimes I see a lot of parents, they come with the kids because they have no one to take care of their child at home and if they come it is disturbing for the adults...other adults will be like, get upset. You know they don't speak it out loud but I heard. They will be like, 'why is this kid running around?" Due to the unpredictable student attendance, each week, they get switched around when they return to the program because some group numbers fall, "if [one tutor] go way down then they would put me in [this tutor's] group. So that's what happens because people's schedules." She said when she doesn't come on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which are her regular times, like when she misses church, she also feels "empty....I don't get to learn something."

Simone uses herself as a barometer for her progress and compares her reading from when she was a child. Reading is done aloud in her groups "so we take turns we go in circle, we read." She feels she is learning because "if I able to take a book and I know I cannot maybe read the whole thing, I could maybe read a couple of pages and if I make a mistake, that I could know it's a different to what I couldn't do thirty years ago you know." At home, Simone wants to read many different materials-- from school report cards to newspapers, and more importantly, to know about her children and have a sense of safety, "Like you're afraid to go anywhere because something may happen. For me reading is difficult and so you can learn about other things other stories, other places. You know, and you able to follow what your kids do in school." Following what her children do in school is often difficult because she has a hard time reading children's stories and explaining why she can't, "I can't get this word and he said your our mother you're supposed to know this...it's very painful for me to explain to him again and have to call his father." Sometimes when her job is switched to another location, she has pressure to spell which is difficult. Still, her four hour a day lunch aide position helps her keep in contact with her girlhood dreams, and also prepares her for one day working with children. She said someday she wants to work with adults too. The story Simone is writing about makes her feel sad for her family and motivates her to take care of herself.

This position gives her benefits which she never got before working as a nanny for a wealthy Jamaican family and which was isolating for her. She did it to support her oldest son who is now nearly thirty and whom she left with her family when he was an infant. Through her husband, she met more people in the Bronx, including her pastor and the pastor's wife who introduced her to the CRW program. She obtained her lunchaide

position because her first tutor at the Fordham CRW took a number of students to the school, and helped them to fill out job applications. The school told her to wait until they could hire them but not to quit their jobs. Two years later they called her. She said she has to move quick on the job and can't "drag" her feet, but it contributes to her sense of worth

Her husband who is a truck driver and has a three year degree, is often tired. Watching the youngest while Simone is in school sometimes gives him "attitude." She feels this is unsupportive. To make matters easier, she often cooks after she comes home and prepares the family for her departure. When she arrives by bus to the CRW for three evenings out of a week, she feels like a "million dollars" when she leaves, "they let you know you're not alone" and she feels like she is a part of the club. Babette, a staff, who she feels respects her, listens to her problems with her husband, and encourages her. And with another staff member, help with her kids when she can't find a babysitter. David, her third tutor, but was also there five years after Simone started the program helps her with the "basic" reading and writing, teaching her to remember words on a "calendar" at home and to break words down and sound out words. They read books in class and she feels this has helped with her reading outside in terms of clothing labels, newspapers, reading part books, and standing in the right line at the post office, "like when I go to the store, I can see the different food product to buy you know before I couldn't. I go to the post office I know which line to go into to buy my stamp to register mail. I go to the bank. I know which line to go into. I go to the store. I know the difference my size clothes and I read."

Simone feels her pronunciation and spelling aren't strong and sometimes she gets frustrated reading at home. When she does, she stops and does dishes to relax. These ease her headaches and frustrations. She wishes David would give more guidance in writing because sometimes she feels bored, but as she indicated in her thank you note that she wrote, that she really respects his consistency and persistence in being at the CRW for such a long time; "rain and snow" he shows up she wrote. Simone also wishes there was more space for class because she can hear the noise of the other groups. She would like to have another hour or two to study there but the building closes at 8 p.m. On the computer, she learned to use the mouse and appreciates the ease of making appointments at the CRW but wishes for more computer time. Simone doesn't talk to the other students much but knows them by face and name, similar to other students who expressed that the other students were important but not integral to their individual learning.

This type of belonging in her class is different than when she was a child in Jamaica. There, she had to help her mother, who was a seamstress. She often sold food in the market. She lived far from school and got there late. She was put in the back of the class, because the teachers "put the bright kids in the front" and "you're all the way behind" and was hard to catch up. The children teased her brothers and sisters for being heavy and her feelings were hurt. She regrets not having an education because when people find out she can't read and write, they 'start to say negative things." The CRW taught her that "we talk and feel the same things." When students are ahead of her in class, she just thinks they are here for the same reason, rather than feel bad about herself. She said, "and to me now the way I am going, and I wanted to be better in my life, I don't

care what anyone say anymore. I'm doing what it took, go to bed and wake up hoping to get to read and write better when one day to come. I don't really care if this person look at her and say, 'oooh she can't read' or 'oooh'' It doesn't matter to me anymore. I just want to do things for myself. Watching a televised showing one day in class made her feel part of a group and proud, "able to come in out of the dark" as she described. Reading history books and stories of other students helps her to identify with this group.

This is a story about a woman who struggles to care for herself and her family and community. But she gets little support from her family even though she has directly asked for it, "I told my husband, I said 'what I'm going to the center for, if you are patient you can help me. But you are not that type." The story she writes about the girl who was brutally raped and murdered is a reminder to her about the importance of what she lost as a child, and her attempts to gain it back. She wants to care for her son's education too, but this is difficult because she has a hard time reading and understanding his report cards and homework. Her husband watches the children while she is at school, but the entire time, she is concerned about his level of support and willingness to do this, after a long day driving a truck. She tries to compensate for his "attitude" by cooking before she comes, and after her work, and picking up her son from school. When her son gets cranky, she feels she has no choice but to care for him. Bringing him to the CRW is a tenuous gamble because she does not know how long the staff can care for him and for her. She receives little formal help for her problems, although the library staff have consistently remained available to her and she feels a sense of belonging.

Elena's Persistence Narrative: "This is My Big, Big Big Dream:" Returning Professional

This is a story of an American Dream in transition, and slowly souring, in one Mexican-American woman's life. Elena's life is nothing like the large Mickey Mouse character painted on the fence to her tightly compact trailer, welcoming people in, from her trailer community, and offering a magical adventure. Her trailer, modified like the others, is hidden behind the monied Silicon Valley. Out of reach of bus stops as well, her story makes for a surreal contrast in wealth and poverty as configured in the Bay Area in the 21st century, especially the housing crisis. Elena, her two sons and husband live the life of outcasts, invisible to the people whose houses Elena cleans and only visible to others in her community and to the library literacy program she attends. Yet she still dreams that her life will become enchanted and transform itself. The fact that as a nurse, educated in Mexico, her competencies and abilities are not used (with the nursing shortage) is a travesty. Still she clings to her "big" hopes for the future.

Currently, Elena's life is about waiting. She waits frequently--for the bus to take her out of the community, for her children to get off of the waiting lists at Project READ, the literacy program at the Redwood City Public Library (because there are so many people already on it), and she waits for the right time to begin her dream career in the U.S. However, now she feels like her life is tightly stretched.

Before they got the trailer, the family waited in a shelter because when Elena

had her second child, the landlord increased their rent above the family income and they had to leave. He charged over $500 for a studio apartment. However, the shelter brought fond memories back to Elena, and she knew her oldest son was happy there during that four months, "David like the very much the shelter place he remembers with a good time." About herself, she said, "for me it was a very good time" because she had a big living room and a big kitchen, "everything for me is big." They could save money for the deposit on the trailer which they were living in for the last three years. Yet she felt like it was too crowded and it was hard for her and her tutor to concentrate on her studies due to her children's demands.

Elena's nursing career is what brought her to the US with a friend whose "objective was vacation" and continues as her dream to have a better life in the US, "my big big dream is work in nurse. This is my big, big, big dream." Yet she feels torn as to how to achieve this dream, and caught between long-term vs. short-term strategies--about whether to work on her career, focus on her sons' education, or help her husband with cash from housecleaning. She links several of these outcomes and feels that by becoming a nurse, she can make a better life for her children, "if I learn more, my home works better because maybe has other job better pay and my sons has a good education-- my sons is the first thing in my life." Right now she is cleaning houses, which is "bad because the chemicals affecting myself. When put tile windex, the amonia, everything is bad for me. But I need work for help my husband." The rashes and allergies she gets from the job make her dreams feel invisible.

She felt she could not be a nurse in the U.S. because of her conversational English, her lack of credentials, and knowledge and competencies with English medical terms, lacking academic literacies, "when I came don't know nothing English nothing." Elena also feels a sense of squeezing herself around everyone else's needs and feels pressured to hurry, "this is the time for my children. I need give, I need give them, time. and I think so, when I learn a little more English, I say with my husband, I tell my husband you give me six months. In six months, in six months, I paying the school, after them, I work better, better work. And I say it's his turn for school."

Although she does not have her citizenship, her husband does, and he works as a landscaper. He also has a car. Aside from money, transportation is a major hindrance for Elena in getting her children to and from school, as well as to the library, "I like this opportunity but my problem is the transportation because its very hard take the bus. Ever[y] leave 3 o'clock the school when I need take the other bus, is 4 o'clock. But I need take it-- can I eat something. And maybe in the house. Because in the morning I work. When I have time in the afternoon, but don't have bus. It's a big, big problem for me." The bus passes only once an hour which makes it difficult for her to attend the Family literacy program sometimes. She thought that a literacy program van to pick people up might help, "maybe I give the program transportation." She added, "no money maybe, I don't know, some programs give the car. Go to the person, pick up the person. Maybe."

The bus is also expensive, $3.65 a day, which makes it difficult to travel and the reason why Tomas, her tutor sometimes comes to the trailer to tutor. Yet it does not resolve how to take care of her children while she is studying and they frequently get interrupted, "for me was this time was terrible. Because when beginning my class, I put the movie for my son. When the movie was finish, is terrible. I need water mommy. And I think my teacher, I think Tomas don't feel good. Because he needs stay more quiet. And me too. Me too." He first started coming when she had a foot problem and couldn't walk.

Currently, they have been tutoring at the library, which she likes because of the quietness and the available computers for Serge, her younger son. But he often interrupts her there too with his restlessness, "because I say to learn, I say learn. It better for me the library. Because it more quiet, my son now is play, with the ball, this noisy is no good for me. My attention is no good. And when he stay in the library he know it stay quiet. But not long time. I need say David and Serge don't run, don't talking. "Sometimes the staff or volunteers at Project READ watch the children which is good for a short time but not over a long time and she often watches them herself, "its good for me because the computer is behind me and can I see Serge because now Serge is. When I go to the meeting, David stay in the school but I need bring with Serge and Serge run, run, run." She is aware that the children are on one of the waiting lists for a tutor.

She found out about Project READ and came in 1998 because of David's teacher, who is also a participant, and told her about the family literacy programming. She said, "his teacher is a student of Project READ and she talked to me the program READ...she say me, I need bring with my daughter, for my daughter and the library. Oh I think, maybe I can go with my sons." Bringing her sons to the program, unlike the adult schools, she thought, could solve some of her problems, "Oh I think maybe I can go with my sons." She wished they had a tutor for them, but "they don't have a tutor for they because they stay in a waiting list." When she first came, she said her children "play with the computer or with books or color books." Project READ has children's software programs, but sometimes when no one is there to watch him, "but we don't have a person, my son play alone and I stay alone and I stay alert for they."

Before she came to Project READ, her uncle told her about Sequoia adult school, in the community. She went for a month because she felt that "English is very important here." But she had to leave the first time due to money and needing to work. She also commented that although the teachers were nice, the other students, were not as attentive, "almost all person is very, very young and all times talk, talk, talk, and play." The second time, was for two to three months. When she got pregnant, she wasn't feeling well and missed classes. She thought it would be too difficult to follow along, "somedays don't feel good and don't went to school is the day don't return. The lesson don't repeat. It was very difficult for me." Having a flexible tutor and schedule at the library might help her to at least get access to an education that fit with her needs and schedule.

Education has always been important to Elena. With the early encouragement of her father to continue school until the 12th grade in Mexico and then go on to get a nursing degree, she feels persistent in living out his dream until today, and the continued

emotional support from him over the phone when she talks to him is important," because he say me all the time when I talk to him maybe every month or every two months what happened with the English?" He calls her and asks about her educational goals, "when I talk to Mexico, he say me, what happened with the school?" Elena really wanted to be doctor but early on said she didn't take her studies seriously and she "had parties in school." Her education in Mexico gave her the academic skills to understand and help with the children's homework, check out books and other media from the library. She said it is important for her to help her children with their homework by herself because it is a bonding activity, and feels she doesn't need as much help from the staff.

Tomas, her tutor, reminds her of her brother in Mexico who she is close to. He acts the part in the way he is attuned to her needs for learning more about nursing and helping her with contacts in the area as well as reading nursing texts, "because I feel I talk to my brother" she said. He speaks Spanish with her so that she can understand certain concepts and also so she can "explain my idea." He pushes her in her studies, but not too much, and in a flexible way that allows for personal communication and feedback, "when I review something he say, he put me homework and I say its good for you he say me its good for you? Is difficult for you? Do you think can I make? I say yes or no. But ever try the homework. When I can I say, read this is my homework review. And when I cannot make, I say I try but I can't. And he say me, its ok let me know." She can let him know that she is not feeling well that day too and needs extra time for learning and studying, "but I say sorry Tomas. Maybe my brain todays don't work and he tell me its ok its ok take care relax maybe other time." She likes him because he is active and patient with her as well as supportive. He also, " thinks I am smart" which makes her feel good. The materials they read are diverse, from Laubach to nursing texts, and she wants to learn more for "business" and feels that he encourages her to speak more in English, using Spanish for definitional purposes. Sometimes she requests he speaks in Spanish "maybe the means English is no good for me, is no good for me. Can I say in Spanish is this, and you say me English this. What happens." His abilities to cross over from Spanish to English and back again help to give her a sense of continuity to her comprehension and enable her to feel comfortable as well. She feels she can cross over too, but in more limited ways, and with doubts about whether her learning can transfer into professional credits.

Speaking is a major goal of Elena's, since she feels this is connected with her work life. While she feels scared of picking up the phone when it rings sometimes, and speaking, as well as filling out job applications, when she is with her husband, who is shy, she feels motivated to speak, "and when I see my husband don't talk, I talk." She wants to continue talking with other students and even thought of putting up a notice about being able to speak with other students conversationally, "one times I think put in the paper the sign, if I want one person interest for talking with other person for help me my speaking skill." This dialogue would allow her to practice and give her a sense of a community of students like herself. She sees her neighbors as needing speaking skills too, and like her, have childcare problems and problems attending. They would like to go to the library but cannot do so with their children. Elena said, " a lot of people need the same program because maybe four mobile homes to the right, has a woman she say me,

oh I want to learn English because I know nothing. If I say why not go to school, she say me I have two kids and the middle one girl has to maybe one year and its very difficult for she go to the library or go to school. Because she don't know drive."

Elena's sense of fulfilling an important role for her children's literacy is to take them to the library, borrow books and read to them. While she checks out books for her children she does not do so for herself and makes a point of using this time exclusively for her children, "don't bring books for me-- only for my sons, because I read for they. Is they say me, mom I like book OK. Bring. Mom, I bring this magazine OK. Bring. Is movie OK. Bring. But don't bring the books for me. Because is, a lot of books don't have time for read. For my favorite reading but I read every day. Books for they."

She has enjoyed working with Tomas on the library computers, because she can get practice in reading and writing. Creating sentences however, on the computers is more difficult than filling in and copying, "it's not easy because my brain work with a logic and the logic is easy for me but when I need make something, it difficult for me. When I need make a sentence it is difficult for me but if you put the sentence up and you say me, maybe you make up a other sentence it's easy for me, because I say I need put this and this and this."

While Project READ tries to help the "whole person" and is infused into Elena's community, her problems exceed their abilities to fully help her, especially those associated with poverty such as transportation and her living conditions. A Mickey Mouse on her fence surrounding her trailer gives a sad but hopeful glimpse at the Disney land dream she hopes her children can live out. She is not a citizen and her potential is not optimized even though someday she hopes it can, and translate to living a more abundant life and career. Tomas has tried to connect her with work opportunities but these did not pan out and he felt frustrated about not being able to connect her with more capital and improve her economic conditions. But she still reads nursing texts and hopes to live out her big big big dream of being a nurse.

Economically, Elena is struggling over where to invest her efforts and with whom: Should she put aside her dreams for her children and what decisions can she make that will get her family out of poverty fastest and for the long term? Since she was not brought up impoverished in Mexico, her current situation presents fundamental new challenges that often make her upset and which she is forced to grapple with. Formerly, she used her education to get ahead, coming to America as part of leisure. Her accidental stay in the United States has been close to a distorted Disney movie. The Mickey Mouse stands for the recreational middle-class life she wishes she still had. The closest her children get to this lifestyle are the computer software programs, and coloring books they play with in the library, as well as the movies she checks out for them.

Malis Persistence Narrative: "To Pass the Yellow Light:" Displacement and Paralysis

Lately, Malis was fearful of driving, and did not trust the yellow streetlights. Proceeding through them could prompt an accident, "and I really scare you know, to pass

the yellow light, oh very scared" she said. Malis who was fifty-two and lived in Greensboro, North Carolina, recently pulled her car over to the side of the road and felt she couldn't breathe after she witnessed an accident. She felt paralyzed. This scene reminded her of a recent car accident she was in over two months ago. A car hit her from behind while she was stopped at a red light, knocking out her teeth and causing her further back injuries that exacerbated and old injury in her neck and back. That evening she was returning from her "favorite" teachers' basic reading and writing class at the Glenwood library on March 23rd. She had been there for about two years.

Since then, for two months, she has been homebound, and without any tutoring or social activities. Accidents, in general, haunted Malis' life, and one in particular, with her older son, who was hit in his car in Italy by a drunk driver makes her feel depressed, especially when she is on wrong medications and starts to ruminate. She feels sad that so many accidental tragedies have happened in her life and she worries about another one occurring.

Malis sat rigidly on her couch during the interview and she was often in pain. Scars from her collarbone shone, from an accident she had at her factory job, due to a fall from picking up boxes. She had no insurance, was switching to different doctors, and had numerous problems associated with communication barriers between herself, her family and her doctors.

Malis' traumatic response to the car accident was part of a series of shocking experiences she has had, especially in the refugee camp, with her children, waiting for her first husband and then later, for her second. This was part of what she called her "very hard story." She experienced similar trauma when her husband who left her in the camp, to escape to Italy, remarried, and then offered to bring her over as his sister, "I keep my heart give to him why he do to me like that? And I his wife. I marry him for very hard. I wait for him. Why he say his sister?" Her thoughts of suicide were discouraged by an elderly woman who reminded her, "you don't think about your husband-- you think about your children."

Since being isolated in the house, she has been taking medicine and is worried she can't remember words she has learned in her literacy program books, "I can't sleep good. Look like booom…" She missed John's class. She said, "when I went before, I went to class I am happy. I had the friends in the class. Made me happy talk. And I have to learn and I have to write. It's good for me. But now I stay home. Not feel good." The communication between herself and doctors around her various accidents, surgeries, and healing have been difficult for her to deal with, but has induced her to want to learn English. Communicating with her doctor tops the list, as well as learning other functional skills, "I live in the United States, I have to learn to speak English. When I know how to speak English you know, easy I go to see a doctor or I go to store or I go to store or I go to work and I want to meet some American friends, my sponsor."

While her husband's formal sponsor encourages her to get her citizenship, there is little else he can do. She counts on her tutor, Nancy, to drive her to the doctor and help her communicate, as well as deal with her insurance. "She help me everything you know,

when I go see a doctor or go to. Or I cannot understand and she help me, take me, go. And she come to my house, pick me up. Very, very good. Good heart. And her husband very good. Nobody help me. On[ly] her"

At work, she felt it was also difficult to communicate with her boss, but she also noted that her English at work had improved over a year's time, "so I think maybe for one year I understand a little bit you know. When I come to work, my boss he spoke to me. I cannot understand the English when he show me something." She learned to copy and model from him, "and I saw he do. I look at him what he do. And I know how to do. I'm watching and I know how to do. I do everything good."

Since the work accident in 1997, in which she fell from a ladder, breaking her collarbone, she had difficulty advocating for herself at work, with doctors, and others in the medical field. Her surgeon felt that her pain in her lower back was not a result of a work injury and she was unable to afford the surgery she needed. Her husband, who owns a landscaping business, had insurance to cover himself and their son, but not her. Consequently, Malis and her family have had a number of stressors due to doctor visits and her older son's inability to explain the problems, and get assistance with her work compensation. She has been alienated from her doctors, lawyers, her church, and the medicine makes her feel "crazy." She is currently alienated from the library and has wondered why John, her favorite teacher has not contacted her. She said he has a "good heart" though and looks forward to returning to his class.

Through the small group that Nancy runs, which is a women's literacy class (started by the Learner Advocate who was an Americorp), she had the ability to tell her story, read stories, and play games. In addition, Akiko, an Americorp, listened and encouraged her literacy and language learning, "she understand when I speak to her and when she speak to me like that." Akiko tells her that if she stays home, "she doesn't do nothing." Akiko coaches her on persistence, "And somebody make me when I upset--- when I want to quit, Akiko she say, Malis you quit and all the times she so sweet and she talk to me. And say Malis, you can do it. I know you can do it. But you quit you stay home what you do? You have not nothing." Other staff members also worked with Malis in the two years she had been attending the program, who like, Akiko supported her emotionally.

The classes were mainly skills-based, and she liked John the best, a community college instructor who taught in the library, "he know how to make the student understand and every Monday and Wednesday and Friday when I come at 10 o'clock, he have five question give me the right. All the students give the right. And look like he look in the book and he say, give me right. I love the teacher. Maybe like that and not same and I write and he say any question. And I have to answer wrong or right like that. And he check every day. For one week and three days I come to class."

While home, Malis wants to learn to read more than the book, *The Present*, one she has on her coffee table, and which she read in Nancy's class. She also read books lying around the house, like an old one from Cambodia called "Essential English." She

wants to have more practice in speaking and being engaged more with the institutions that surround her, "One day I tell my husband, who know to do for me, to know how to speak English, write and read for my son, the report card, or the newspaper or for something like that. I want to know how to read and write for report. I tell my husband who know how to do for me, not hard to me. Learn too hard."

She recently got her citizenship through studying at the Glenwood library. Getting her citizenship was the highlight of the last year, and she became immersed in this objective through citizenship materials, "I love the citizen-- all the time I got to carry the book everywhere" as well as tapes she got from the library. She felt that everyone encouraged her, including the officer who was impressed with how much she knew, and reassured her, "July 4, who the first president and how many states. And I forget. He asked me about fifteen or twenty questions. I know how to answer all. He asked me, he say, how many state in the United State and I said thirteen state. He look at me. He give me the right." She was worried about forgetting what she learned in class, and was nervous at the test, "inside office I am very nervous and my heart--bmmm. I talked to myself. Malis, you calm down. Be ok, be ok." I remember [the library staff members], Nancy says Malis you can do it. Martin Smith [her husband's sponsor] called me-- I know Malis I know you can do it." She remembers he said, "I believe you pass." Nancy said "Malis I know you can do it I hear all the time like that." And she remembers breathing, and talking to herself and "not scare." She said the man, "He tell me sit down and I sit down, and he say its ok its ok." While she learned to let he feelings of fear to sweep over her rather than paralyze her, and obtained internal control, the purpose of this citizenship in light of her major health problems seem small and overshadowed the self-efficacy she gained through studying and passing the test.

Fear was something she lived with for years, fleeing from the Pol Pot regime and then, living in a Thai camp. She was stolen from, had depression, hunger, and only a couple of supporters. She remembers her terrifying exodus, "Many times I want to kill myself. And somebody want to kill me-- many times. And Vietnam when I run, Vietnam soldiers I run and he shoot me. God help me." Once she got to Thailand and the refugee camp, she heard from her husband who ran to Italy with their older son. When she found out he remarried, she was more traumatized but felt spurred on by her children, "I love my children I love so much and I say why? I wait for him I not meet somebody I not love somebody. I keep my heart give to him why he do to me like that? And I his wife I marry him for very hard." In the camps, her three other children learned English and she survived by selling pan and cigarettes. She eventually met her second husband in 1986 and was remarried to him. She moved to the US in 1988, waiting for him for another two years while he settled in with his Vietnam veteran sponsor's help.

Before the library program, she attended a community college program for two weeks, but quit due to a friend who stopped going and was driving her. At the time she did not have a car. After some absences, her teacher called her and told her to watch Channel four for its cartoons, "I look cartoon all the time every day" she remembered. She recalled, "my teacher she very good and she call me and say Malis why you not come to class. I told her, I cannot understand. My husband he answer. And she tell me

why I not come to class and tell me, she tell me I watch TV. Channel 4 the cartoon…they have the cartoon learn to speak English and I look cartoon all the time every day around 4 o'clock to 5,6 yea watch TV all the time."

She and her children learned a little English in the camp, her first exposure. Before that, she had little formal education. When she was younger, she rarely attended school after the age of ten, and remembers looking in the window of the schoolhouse and watching the teacher write on the board, "I sit outside the window and look at the board and he write and I stay outside and I gather paper. Not have paper. Somebody throw paper something like that. Look the paper is good and I have some, not the pen the pencil and I write like that." She had to help her mother (who is still alive) and seven other siblings to survive with the family farm—picking rice, pineapples, and oranges.

Malis feels she "try very hard" but feels trapped because of her pain and isolation in the home. She remembers the Learner Advocate's affirmation and says it to herself, "you stay home what you do? You have nothing." When she reads, she often nods off because of the medication, but she has always worried about losing her memory, "now I have the teacher to teach me to learn English. I still not remember." She said "I know before I younger. Surgery. Lose memory a lot. I think maybe I have surgery two, three times, and too much medicine made me sleepy. And made me you know. The kind medicine. Not good for heart and I got old too. And I think too much too."

Malis' story is a case of a deep need for well-rounded, strategic advocacy. The library has filled many needs in her life, including functional literacy, emotional coaching, and help with social connectedness in a way her church, family, and professionals in her community could not help. But now she needs far more than either the library or her immediate family can offer, especially as she becomes increasingly isolated. Her husband is in many ways, more protected than Malis through his official sponsorship and because he formally participated in the Vietnam war. He came to the U.S. and got a landscaping business, bought a home and had insurance coverage for himself and his son. But Malis is not covered by anyone. Her work in a factory without insurance has resulted in major back, neck, and hip problems, along with fractured familial relations as her son tries to advocate for her but unsuccessfully. Her need for home tutoring can't be satisfied by a library that has problems recruiting as many quality tutors as ESOL students need. Meanwhile, Malis has used many library resources and people, including staff, library books, and tapes, to meet many of her goals and needs while she was mobile. Her lack of a social network, and quitting of her church, has increased her sense of alienation. She wants to move carefully and doesn't trust the ambiguous messages she is given in this new country from doctors, lawyers, and the yellow streetlights that symbolize her fear.

Emerging Themes

Themes from the women emerged in the analysis across the narratives. The narratives were compared in whole to one another and themes emerged from common

issues they expressed, and which were also evident in the literature on this population. There were several themes that emerged:

Husbands all appeared in the women's narratives as prominent background figures that impacted their persistence, yet in a mixed way and often indirectly. They would support the women to a point; Simone's husband would babysit, but with an "attitude." Elena probably got the most support from her husband to go to school, as well as from her father. However, she felt responsible for contributing to the family income which caused stress and demands on her time. Husbands, as in Rockhill's study, interacted more in public and the women all felt their husbands had more fluent oral English. Often, they were citizens, earned higher incomes, had consistent access to their own cars with driver's licenses, and were in more stable jobs. The women had tensions between spending time at school instead of working and contributing to the family income.

Health problems also emerged for the women as prominent, including pregnancies that were difficult. Health problems discouraged them from attending school, and contributed to temporary leaves of absences. Manual, and low-skilled work also caused health problems for the women which were difficult for the them to resolve. These problems were often viewed as individualistic and which they had to handle themselves. Malis struggled the most with her health problems, with blocked access to the medical system. Her tutor, while an advocate for her health (she was a retired nurse), became disturbed with both the system and as a go-between with family members. Malis did feel she was a friend and had helped her tremendously. While self-study relieved some boredom while the women were "on leave" (and which included public television watching, and reading alone) it was not a full substitute or compensation for the social interactions they received when they were actively enrolled in the program.

The women all expressed a strong belief in education and their identities to "better themselves" as Simone expressed, by coming to school (which was another theme expressed in Rockhill's 1990 study), and recovering a lost opportunity. The library literacy program figured as a pivotal point in the move from the private to a public life, especially with regard to work, and acquiring cultural and social capital, as well as a personal sense of power. This was a major symbolic type of support to persistence. This was perhaps the strongest support for persistence, and allowed them to attend the program.

Another strong barrier to persistence for the women was transportation. Their problems with public transportation made them feel immobile and helpless. The problems included bus schedules and costs, routes, time to travel, transporting children, and low proximity to library. Driving was both a problem and a desire for the women to increase their sense of autonomy. Most lacked licenses and driving experiences. The programs tried to compensate through scheduling of classes, and having off-site tutors, but often this was not enough. For example, although Elena's tutor came to her trailer to study with her, the children were distracting. Financial problems permeated through the women's stories around transportation. All of the women could be considered poor and working-

class, with a lack of personal and family financial resources which caused stress and mediated their persistence in a pervasive way.

The work place was both a support and barrier to persistence. It was a support in terms of motivating and pressuring the students to acquire more and varied English literacy and language, like Simone, who was switched to and from schools and wanted to ensure she could read notes written by her various supervisors, her son's report cards as well as other functional texts. This was a similar case for Malis who wanted to read report cards, and books she had at home. Since Elena had more literacy skills and education, she was more interested in an academic approach, which drove her to study nursing texts. But she also felt pessimistic around reading, writing, speaking and understanding English, given the immediate constraints in her life, and her need to do housecleaning where she was silent. Work was a barrier in terms of the energy it drained from the women and how it marked their lives in physical ways, including isolation, accidents, and the hazards of domestic work. When they came, they often came very tired, which transportation problems exacerbated.

Childcare issues were another major problem experienced by the women, and which connected to poverty, transportation, and little additional help from people. While the women's work and dreams for work thrust them into needing more literacy skills and into more of a public sphere, their childcare, and family demands pulled them back into the private world and made them feel held back. Like Simone stated, "once I have someone to babysit, I can get the time to come and hopefully in the future to move on I really want to, you know, to move on."

The library offered a safe place with flexible instruction and some supports by which the women could access the program, especially a caring, well-educated staff and the ability to personally express themselves. But it clearly could not offer them more basic supports they needed: more money and resources, better transportation and public services, more available advocates, and childcare. Yet it did offer the women a "place" and emotional supports to express their dreams for themselves, as they transitioned from the domestic sphere, and attempted to claim a new space for themselves. In many ways, the library literacy programs psychologically and physically "held" them in the best ways they could. The women struggled with multiple inter-related problems that could not be easily separated into classic categories and defied stereotypical images. The volunteer tutors, although patient and caring, were not providing enough supports to allow for the women to obtain full access to the programs on a consistent basis.

Theoretical and practical implications

Since libraries have historically been positioned as "sponsors of literacy" in communities (see, Brandt, 2001; Monroe, 1986 Spangenberg, 1996), offering information and referrals and collaborating with partnering agencies, becoming more enmeshed with the community-based education movement and network would be key to supporting women immigrants as library constituents. The library doesn't need to play a neutral role but can play an active community outreach role, and assess community needs in an in-

depth way to benefit this population. There is a need for more proactive advocacy on the part of librarians for immigrant communities, some of whom are literacy students in libraries. This means not expecting literacy programs to offer all of the supports to retain their students. With better relations between literacy programs and libraries, the programs can take advantage of the myriad resources of the library and their community partnerships and resources, as well as the professional training of librarians to locate important community information sources. Literacy programs can formalize the partnerships they have developed with other community social service agencies, obtain more personal contacts with them, and help students move through a community-based network of agencies. The women needed advocates who could "sponsor" and advocate for them; Malis needed directed help in navigating the legal and medical system, Simone, with her son's school and for daycare, and Elena needed help in many different areas, especially economic assistance. Potential advocates in their personal networks were not able to do this work mainly because they also experienced stress and strain, and some of the women were isolated. Treating these problems as ones that are community-based allows the women to access more supports and to attend programs and persist with greater ease within their local contexts. These women were often isolated from other agencies and their sole contact was through the library. As a safe place that did not expect or require them to sacrifice too much, the women felt comfortable to "be" there, as Simone articulated, "and they let you know you're not alone and that's what they're here for."

The women also needed more practice not just in speaking but in assertiveness, and they needed advocates to assist them and support them in acquiring more supports among network members and community agencies. For the ESOL women, speaking was fraught with power and problems as they tried to navigate everyday life and various bureaucracies, which reinforces Norton's thesis about the importance of community power positions and relations. Opportunities for the women to dialogue more among one another, create community in the program, and allow for conversation groups, support groups, and opportunities for more free-form talk. Reflection allows for practicing, modeling, and self-advocacy. These activities have the potential to stimulate more "enacted" supports exchanges (see, Antonucci, 1986; Streeter & Franklin, 1992; Tracy & Whittaker, 1990; Uehara, 1990) among women (informational, emotional, and material). Understanding the importance of how these different supports, coming from various network members are exchanged is important; "informal supports" from family and friends are more spontaneous and at a time of need (for example, emotional aid and attunement to a person's immediate problem). These have a different value than "formal supports" offered by professionals institutions, and which are more specialized, standardized, and rule-governed (see, Streeter & Franklin, 1992). Enhancing and learning direct advocacy and leadership skills can also support a more embodied and engaged type of learning (see, hooks, 1994), and with this, a sense of an affirmative community of women who are collectively learning and supporting one another. Building community in programs with women, instructionally and through support services, can assist the women in persisting in their literacy education and objectives because it is a holistic approach.

Identifying the deeper structural issues of barriers to women's attainment and then providing support mechanisms to help them come to class as well as understand the supports better can be achieved programmatically as well as on an instructional level, for example, through Project-based learning. This extends advocacy and women's community development in a practical way. Furthermore, encouraging students to write, share, and publish their stories allows women the opportunity to gain more authority and a sense of authorship over their experiences. Offering professional counseling to women (individual and group) as well as educational counseling services, especially for those who may not have access to it elsewhere, may be equally important for learning and expanding their abilities to acquire resources, deal with stress and trauma, and obtain relevant help (Horsman, 2000; Isserlis, 2000).

It is also important to acknowledge the symbols of English literacy, language, and education and the contradictory effects it has on students. The women recognized that their literacy practices in the library were part of " a state of grace" (Mackeracher, 1989), of expressing themselves culturally and personally in the world. The acquisition of social and cultural capital, especially in handling American popular life was important to the women. Critical literacy (see, Freire, 1987; Norton, 2000), which challenges and expands the multiple contexts for literacy can allow for native language literacy to flourish also, and which was evident in one of the women's narratives, and used in two of the programs (Redwood City and Greensboro). Reflective dialogue, oral histories, and community activism could stem from using both narratives and native language literacy in learning with the library as supporting popular culture and education.

Conclusion

The simplistic frameworks of identifying conventional barriers don't capture the full consequences, processes, and conflicts stemming from women immigrants' multiple demands and relations with regard to their persistence. It also doesn't highlight the support system that immigrant women may need to persist. Mico-macro linkages between programs and women's lives are important to develop to support women immigrants. Building women up as autonomous citizens within their local communities is important and developing policies on all levels, especially in community-based types of programs, to support this is relevant (see, Stromquist, 2001a). Women who return to school and persist often have strong support systems and develop advocacy skills in their communities (see, Nixon-Ponder, 96). Women- positive programming (Carmack, 1992; Imel & Kerka, 1996; Campbell, 1992) may be relevant instructionally and for support, in reducing women's isolation. A safe foundation for learning is key to this process with the need for students to feel they have a "place in the world" (McGinnis, in Decandido, 2001) and for locating and building their public identities, visibility, and important experiences.

Women immigrants in programs are persisting for a number of reasons related to but not exclusively for literacy and English language purposes. They came for many personal and social reasons, wanting to "become somebody" as Rockhill found in her study. Simone said, "To me now, the way I am going, and I wanted to be better in my

life, I don't care anyone said anymore. I don't want to go to bed hoping to can read or write better one day to come, so I don't really care if look at her, oooh she can't read, or, oooh, doesn't matter me anymore. I just want to do things. For myself. I told my husband, I said, what I'm gonna do this center if you were patient you could help me. But you are not that type. So I'm going to someone who take their time, whether its rain or its snow, they...there to help us." Paying attention to persistence over and beyond a mark in a register log or a database field gives a full picture of the reasons why women immigrants stay, leave, and return to programs and use them as just one means for claiming a space in the world.

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